AL-GHAZĀLĪ

Kitāb sharḥ ʿajāʾib al-qalb

THE MARVELS OF THE HEART

Book 21 of the *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*

THE REVIVAL OF THE RELIGIOUS SCIENCES

Translated *from the* Arabic
with an Introduction *and* Notes
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with a Foreword *by* T. J. Winter

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Foreword

THAT THE "HEART" IS the center of all our deeper forms of knowing appears to be a truism in the major world religions. In the Islamic universe, the principle that the Qurʾān itself was revealed not to the Prophet's mind but to his heart (2:97; 26:194) led to a permanent division between merely ratiocinative and inspirational forms of religious knowledge. Islamic civilization came to be characterized by the concurrent flow of two rivers, of rationalist and mystical disciplines of knowledge, and most of the time this coexistence was a peaceful one. Formal systematic theologians (*mutakallimūn*) cultivated their sciences in the world of the exoteric *madrasa*, speculating about a God of supreme otherness (*tanzīh*); while the Sufis met in separate lodges (*khanqāh, tekke, zāwiya, daotang*), encountering, in love, the God who may, in a mysterious way, be likened (*tashbīh*) to what we know.

The greatest thinkers of the civilization were often those who theorized about this tension, and sought to produce a universal theology of Islam that could reconcile *tanzīh* with *tashbīh*. This required mastery of all the relevant disciplines, including the legacy of the Greeks as it had been selectively integrated into Islamic thought. The Greeks had themselves faced an analogous tension, which was to some extent reflected by the Aristotelian and Platonic traditions. By the time their culture was assimilated by the Muslims, complex Neoplatonic schemes had attempted, and in some measure achieved, a concord; but it fell to the Muslims to reconcile this late Hellenistic system with the givens of revealed monotheism. With its focus on the undifferentiated One, Islam was, in an important way, more hospitable to the Greek legacy than was trinitarian Christianity, and its

paedia of Religion and Ethics.[25] [The soul is divided into three: vegetative, animal, and human (rational) soul.] Each one of these divisions is further subdivided as follows:

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Vegetative Soul</td><td colspan="3">Powers of nutrition</td></tr>
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hearing
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formative faculty
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memory</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Human or Rational Soul</td><td colspan="3">Active Intelligence (practical reason)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="3">Speculative Intelligence (theoretical reason) perceives ideas by</td><td>material intellect or potentiality of knowledge</td></tr>
<tr><td>intellect of possession recognizes axiomatic knowledge</td></tr>
<tr><td>perfected intellect lays hold on intelligibles</td></tr>
</table>

This system was adopted in large part by Ghazālī, and it formed the framework of his philosophy of mind.

25 *Religion and Ethics*, 2:274ff. Cf. Brett, *Psychology*, 2:54ff.; Muʿtazid Weliur-Rahman, "The Psychology of Ibn-i-Sina," *Islamic Culture* 9, no. 2 (April 1935), pp. 341ff.

This list of the internal senses differs from some of Ghazālī's other classifications. Five other lists are presented in tabular form. [See following tables.] In this book Ghazālī deals with practical and ethical ends, and perhaps did not feel that it was necessary to be scientifically accurate in his statement. It will be noted that the classifications given in the first four of the books as tabulated below are definite attempts to present the subject systematically.

	Maqāṣid al-falāsifa	*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*	*Mīzān al-ʿamal*
1	Common sense *ḥiss mushtarak*	Common sense; imagination *ḥiss mushtarak*; *khayāliyya*	Common sense; imagination *ḥiss mushtarak*; *khayāliyya* anterior ventricle of brain
2	Retentive imagination; conservation *mutaṣawwira; ḥāfiẓa* anterior ventricle	Retentive imagination *ḥāfiẓa*	Retentive imagination *ḥāfiẓa* anterior ventricle
3	Estimation *wahmiyya* posterior ventricle	Estimation *wahmiyya* posterior ventricle	Estimation *wahmiyya* end of middle ventricle
4	Compositive animal and human imagination *mutakhayyila* *mufakkira* middle ventricle	Compositive animal and human imagination *mutakhayyila* *mufakkira* middle ventricle	Compositive animal and human imagination *mutakhayyila* *mufakkira* middle ventricle
5	Memory *dhākira* posterior ventricle	Memory *dhākira* posterior ventricle	Memory *dhākira* posterior ventricle

Author's Foreword

In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate.[1]

Praise belongs to God,[2] whose majesty perplexes the hearts and thoughts of those who seek in vain to comprehend it;[3] whose shining light at its beginning is such as to bewilder eye and sight; who is acquainted with all hidden secrets; who knows all that conscience conceals; who has no need of counselor or helper in ruling His kingdom; the Overturner of hearts and the Forgiver of sins; the Concealer of faults; the Deliverer from anxieties. And may blessings and peace rest in abundance upon the master of the messengers, who unites religion and defeats heretics, and upon his descendants, the righteous, and the pure.

The honor and excellence of man, in which he surpasses all other sorts of creatures, is his aptitude for knowing God, praise be to Him. This knowledge is man's beauty and perfection and glory in the present world, and his provision and store for the world to come. He is prepared for this knowledge only through his heart, and not by means of any of his members. For it is the heart that knows God, and works for God, and strives toward God, and draws near to Him, and reveals that which is in the presence of God. The members of the body, on the other hand, are merely

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1 A pious phrase known as the *basmala*. It confers blessings, and is used at the beginning of formal writings as well as in many other connections touching all phases of Muslim life.

2 The *ḥamdala* is an ascription of praise to God; it is used as one of the fixed introductory phrases to every formal writing.

3 Zabīdī says that the mystics' knowledge of God is in the fact that they come experientially to know that they can never know Him in the sense of having a complete experiential knowledge of His being and attributes. This knowledge is His alone.

Chapter 4

An Exposition of the Special Properties of the Heart of Man

KNOW THAT GOD HAS bestowed on all animals other than man all of these things that we have mentioned. For animals have appetence and anger, and the senses, both outer and inner. Thus the sheep sees the wolf with her eye and knows in her heart its enmity, and so flees from it. That is an inner perception.

We will now mention that which peculiarly characterizes the heart of man, and because of which he has been given great honor and is qualified to draw near to God, the Exalted. This special characteristic has its basis in knowledge and will. By 'knowledge' is meant that knowledge which deals with the things of this world[1] and the world to come, and with intellectual realities (*ḥaqāʾiq ʿaqliyya*). These things are beyond the objects of sense perception, and animals do not share with man in them. Nay, rather, knowledge of axioms and universals (*al-ʿulūm al-kulliyya al-ḍarūriyya*) is a peculiar property of the intellect. Thus a man judges that a single individual[2] cannot be imagined to be in two places at one time. This is his judgment for every individual, although it is well known that he has only observed some individuals by his sense perception. So his judgment passed on all individuals goes beyond that which sense has perceived. If you understand this in regard to this obvious axiomatic knowledge, it is even more obvious in the rest of the theoretical sciences (*naẓariyyāt*).

1 Zabīdī and Princeton MS read 'of religion.'

2 Zabīdī text reads 'horse' instead of 'individual' throughout this illustration.

and the heart is his king. If the king enjoys good health, so also do his armies.'" She said, "Thus have I heard the Messenger of God ﷺ speak."[21]

ʿAlī[22] ؓ also, in illustrating the heart of man, said, "Verily, God, the Exalted, in His earth has vessels, and they are the hearts of men. Those most beloved by Him, the Exalted, are the gentlest, the clearest, and the most robust."[23] Then he explained, saying, "The most robust in religion, the clearest in certainty, and the gentlest to the brethren." This is a reference to the statement of [God] the Exalted, *hard against the unbelievers and merciful among themselves* (48:29), and the statement of [God] the Exalted, *His light is like a niche within which is a lamp* (24:35). Ubayy b. Kaʿb[24] ؓ said, "This means 'as the light of a believer and his heart.'" Again there is the statement of [God] the Exalted, *Or like the darkness in a vast deep ocean* (24:40), which is an illustration of the heart of the hypocrite. Zayd b. Aslam[25] said of the statement of [God] the Exalted, *in a preserved tablet* (85:22), "It is the heart of the believer." Sahl said, "The heart and the breast are like the throne and the seat." These then are the examples of the heart.

21 ʿIrāqī says that this *ḥadīth* was not authentic.

22 ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the cousin of the Prophet and his son-in-law, was the fourth caliph; see *EI*, 1:283ff. *EI*^{2}, 1:381.

23 A weak *ḥadīth* quoted from Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*.

24 Ubayy b. Kaʿb, a Helper (d. 22 or 30/643 or 650). He wrote down some of the prophetic revelation for Muḥammad. See Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *A Biographical Dictionary of Persons who knew Mohammed* (Calcutta, 1856), 1:30ff. Ibn Qutayba, *Ibn Coteiba's Handbuch der Geschichte*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (Götingen: bei Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1850), p. 133.

25 Zayd b. Aslam al-ʿAdawī (d. 36/656) was a freedman of the caliph ʿUmar and a reliable *ḥadīth* scholar. Ibn Ḥajar, 2:39; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. Gustav Flügel (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1871–2), pp. 23, 225.

Chapter 9

An Exposition of the Difference in Rank between the Two Positions by a Tangible Example

KNOW THAT THE WONDERS of the heart are outside the realm of things perceived through the senses (*mudrakāt al-ḥawāss*),[1] for the heart is also beyond sense perception. The understandings are too weak to grasp, except by means of a tangible example, that which is not perceived through the senses. So we shall explain this to people of weak understanding by means of two examples.

For the first illustration let us suppose that a reservoir is dug in the earth, into which the water can be conducted from the surface above through streams which empty into it. The bed of the reservoir may also be dug up and the dirt removed from it until the fountain of pure water is reached, and then the water bursts forth from the bottom of the reservoir. This water is purer and more constant, and perhaps more copious and abundant. The heart then is like the reservoir and knowledge like the water. The five external senses are like the streams. Knowledge may possibly be conducted to the heart by means of the streams of the senses and the consideration of things observed until it is thus filled with knowledge. It is also possible to stop up these streams [from flowing into] it by solitude and seclusion and averting the eyes from seeing, and then to resolve in the depths of the heart to purify it and remove from it the layers of veils until the fountain of knowledge bursts forth from within it.

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1 *Ḥawāss*, external senses. See Weliur-Rahman, "The Psychology of Ibn-i-Sina," pp. 344–51.

But if you say, "How can knowledge burst forth from the heart itself while it is destitute of it," know that this is one of the wonders of the heart's secrets. It is not permissible to deal with it in the knowledge of proper conduct (*ʿilm al-muʿāmala*). This much, however, can be mentioned, that the real natures of things are written down in the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), and indeed in the hearts of the angels who are brought near [to God].

For just as an architect draws plans for buildings on blank paper and then brings them into actuality in accordance with that archetype (*nuskha*), thus the Creator of the heavens and the earth wrote an archetype of the world from beginning to end upon the Preserved Tablet, and then brought it into actuality in accordance with that archetype.

From the world which has been brought into actuality in the image [of the archetype] there is transmitted to the external senses and the retentive imagination (*khayāl*)[2] still another image. For whoever looks at the sky and the earth and then closes his eyes, sees in his imagination the image of the sky and the earth, so that it is as though he were looking at them; and were the sky and the earth annihilated and he himself remained, he would find within himself the image[3] of the sky and the earth as though he were beholding them and looking at them.

Then from his imagination an effect is transmitted to the heart, so that there is represented in it the real natures of things that have entered into sensation and imagination. The representation in the heart corresponds to the world that is represented in the imagination, which in turn corresponds to the world as it exists in itself, external to the imagination and heart of man. This existing world corresponds to the archetype existing in the Preserved Tablet.

Thus the world has four degrees of existence.[4] There is existence in the Preserved Tablet; this is prior to its corporeal (*jismānī*) existence. Its

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2 *Khayāl*, the power to preserve the forms of sensibles perceived by the common sense after the objects themselves have been removed. It is a storehouse for the common sense, placed in the back part of the front ventricle of the brain, Jurjānī, *al-Taʿrīfāt*, p. 107. See also Wolfson, "Internal Senses," p. 100n.; Weliur-Rahman, "The Psychology of Ibn-i-Sina," p. 353.

3 Editor's note: here, Imam al-Ghazālī uses the word *ṣūra*, usually translated as form.

4 Cf. Ibn Sīnā's three modes of existence. Things are *ante res*, in the mind of God; *in rebus*, natural existence together with its accidents; and *post res*, as conceived by the human intellect. Ueberweg, *Philosophy*, 1:413. Ghazālī has merely subdivided

real (*ḥaqīqī*) existence follows this, and it is followed in turn by its imaginative (*khayālī*) existence,[5] by which I mean the existence of its image in the imagination. Its imaginative existence is followed by its intellectual existence, by which I mean the existence of its image within the heart. Some of these [orders of] being are immaterial (*rūḥāniyya*) and some [are] corporeal. Of the immaterial, some are more immaterial in their [order of] being than others. This is a kindness (*luṭf*) coming from the divine wisdom; for God has made the pupil of your eye in such a way that, in spite of its smallness, there is pictured within it the image of the world, the heavens and the earth, with all their widespread extent. Then it goes on from existence in the realm of sensation to existence in the imagination, and from it to existence in the heart. For you can never apprehend anything save that which has reached you; and were it not that He has placed an image (*mithāl*)[6] of the whole world within your very being you would have no knowledge of that which is apart from yourself. Glory belongs unto Him who has ordered these wonders in the heart and eye, and then blinded the heart and eye to the perception of them so that the hearts of the majority of creatures have become ignorant of themselves and their wonders.

Let us now go back to intended purpose and say, "It is conceivable that the real nature of the world might be represented in the heart, its mental image coming now from the senses and again from the Preserved Tablet; even as it is conceivable that the image of the sun should be represented in the eye, coming now from looking directly at it, and again from looking at the water on which the sun shines which reproduces its image." So whenever the veils are lifted between the heart and the Preserved Tablet, the heart sees the things which are therein, and knowledge bursts forth into it therefrom, so that it does not have to acquire its knowledge through the avenues of the senses. This is like the bursting forth of water from the depths of the earth. Whenever the heart becomes occupied with things

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this third division, *post res*, into imaginative and intellectual existence. In this chain of modes of existence we see some of the influence of Neoplatonism on Arabic philosophy.

5 Editor's note: On the imagination, see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

6 Cf. the Aristotelian idea of the human soul as a microcosm, uniting in itself all the faculties of the other orders of animate existence and distinguished by *nous*. Ueberweg, *Philosophy*, 1:168.

in the imagination derived from sensibles (*maḥsūsāt*), this veils it from examining the Preserved Tablet, just as when water is collected from streams [into a reservoir]; it is thereby prevented from bursting forth from the earth; or just as he who looks into the water that reproduces the image of the sun is not looking at the sun itself.

Thus the heart has two doors.[7] One door opens toward the world of spirits (*ʿālam al-malakūt*), which is the Preserved Tablet and the world of the angels (*ʿālam al-malāʾika*). The other door opens toward the five external senses that are tethered to the visible material world. This visible world also resembles the world of spirits to a certain extent. Now the fact that the door of the heart is opened to the acquisition of knowledge through the senses is a thing you understand. But regarding its door that opens to the world of spirits and [is able to] see the Preserved Tablet, you have certain knowledge through meditating upon the wonders of dream-visions (*ruʾyā*) and the heart's observation in sleep of what will be in the future or what was in the past, without any acquisition on the part of the senses.

That door, however, is opened only to one who devotes himself exclusively to the remembrance of God, the Exalted. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Men of a single [thought] have taken the lead."[8] He was asked, O Messenger of God, "Who are they?" He answered, "Those who are devoted to the remembrance of God, the Exalted, for this remembrance (*dhikr*) of theirs has put away from them their load of sin and they come to the resurrection unburdened."[9] Then he described them by relating the statement of God, the Exalted, "Then I shall draw near with my face toward them. Do you think that anyone knows what thing I desire to bestow upon him toward whom I turn my face?" Then He, the Exalted, said, "The first thing I give

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7 Man's potential intelligence is made actual from two directions: divine inspiration, and reasoning and argumentation. This was taught by Ibn Sīnā (Weliur-Rahman, "The Psychology of Ibn-i-Sina," pp. 356ff.); Ueberweg, *Philosophy*, 1:412ff.; Brett, *Psychology*, 2:51, 57), and further developed by Ghazālī, who added Sufi elements as we find here. The soul of man, or his heart, is between sense perception and divine illumination and is influenced by them both, in the sense that both are sources of knowledge. This is similar to what Ghazālī has already told us of man's being between the angel and the demon, in the sense of being influenced by them both in the sphere of conduct.

8 This first part is an authentic *ḥadīth* given by Muslim from Abū Hurayra.

9 This latter part, which begins 'for this remembrance' and so on, is a weak addition. Wensinck, *Handbook*, p. 97a.

them is that I cast light into their hearts and they give tidings of me even as I give tidings of them."[10] The entrance for these tidings is the inner door.

So this is the difference between the knowledge of the prophets and saints and that of the learned and the philosophers (*ḥukumāʾ*): the knowledge of the former comes from within the heart through the door that is opened toward the world of spirits, whereas the knowledge of the philosophers[11] comes through the doors of the senses that open to the material world. The wonders of the world of the heart and its wavering between the visible and invisible worlds cannot be fully dealt with in a [study of the] knowledge of proper conduct. But this is an example that will teach you the difference of the entrance of the two [kinds of] knowledge.

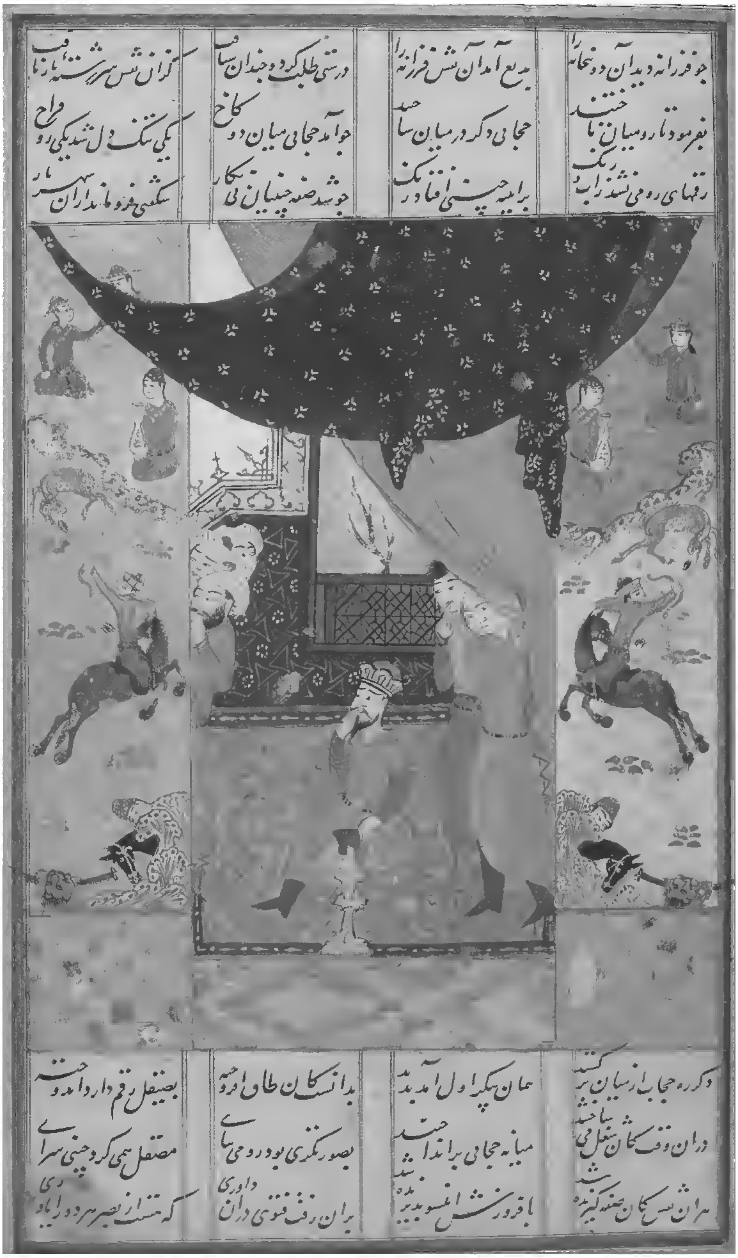
The second example will explain to you the difference between the two types of action, by which I mean the action of the learned and that of the saints. The learned work to acquire knowledge itself and gather it into the heart, but the saints among the Sufis labor only [with the goal of] polishing, cleansing, clarifying, and brightening the heart.

The story is told that once the Chinese[12] and the Byzantines (Rūm) vied with one another before a certain king as to the beauty of their workmanship in decorating and painting. So the king decided to give over to them a portico so that the Chinese might decorate one side of it and the Byzantines the other side; and to let a curtain hang down between them so as to prevent either group from looking at the other. And he did so. The Byzantines gathered together countless strange colors, but the Chinese entered without any color at all and began to polish their side and to brighten it. When the Byzantines had finished, the Chinese claimed that they had finished also. The king was astonished at their statement and the way in which they had finished the decorating without any color at all. So they were asked, "How have you finished the work without any color?" They replied, "You are not responsible for us; lift the veil." So they lifted it, and behold on their side there shone forth the wonders of the Byzantine skill with added illumination and dazzling brilliance, since that side had

10 A "ḥadīth qudsī," see *EI*, 2:190b, 4:336a; *EI*², 3:28. I do not find its source.

11 Editor's note: the Cairo text has *ḥikma* (wisdom), Zabīdī (7:254) has *ḥukamāʾ*, as used above.

12 Zabīdī gives a proverb which says that wisdom descended (in special power) upon three bodily members: the brain of the Greek, the hand of the Chinese, and the tongue of the Arab. See following page for painting representing the contest.



A painting of the contest that takes place between the Chinese and the Byzantines. (From a manuscript of Niẓāmī, *Khamsa,* Shiraz, 1449–50, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 13.228.3, fol. 332r.).

Let us then limit ourselves to this brief mention of the wonders of the heart, for to undertake it in complete detail is not appropriate for [a discussion of] the knowledge of proper conduct (*muʿāmala*). But we have mentioned what is needed in order to know the depths and secrets of the knowledge of proper conduct, in order to benefit the one who is not satisfied with the external, nor content to take the shell instead of the kernel, but longs to have a detailed knowledge of the true nature of causes. In what we have mentioned he will find that which, if God wills, will both suffice and convince. God is Lord of success.[12]

The *Book of the Marvels of the Heart* is complete, and to God be praise and gratitude. It is followed by the *Book of Disciplining the Soul and Refining the Character.*

Praise be to God alone, and may
His blessing be upon
every chosen
servant.

12 Zabīdī omits all that follows; MSS have slightly varying endings.

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Colophon

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أَلَا بِذِكْرِ ٱللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ ٱلْقُلُوبُ

Verily in the remembrance of God
do hearts find tranquility

Qurʾān 13:28